

## **TURBULENT ELECTION HISTORY : AN APPRAISAL OF PRECIPITATING FACTORS IN NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Nigeria's electoral politics from independence has been tumultuous. Violence has continued to mar the conduct of almost all general elections, making free and fair elections a *desideratum*. Thus, electoral violence has proved to be Nigeria's harbinger of national instability as unabated festering irregularities that manifest at different stages of election subject almost all Nigeria's election below the minimum democracy standard. However, for elections to be termed democratic, it must be free and fair. In view of this, the thrust of this paper is a reflection on the tides of electoral violence and the attendant precipitating factors that make free and fair election pretty difficult in Nigeria. This paper however concludes with recommendations of policy options to remedy the menace of electoral violence in Nigeria.

**Key Words: Election, Electoral Violence, Political Violence, Democracy, Nigeria**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Election is generally accepted in all climes of the world as the hallmark of democracy. However, since the advent of democratization in Africa in the 1990's, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on holding regular elections(Molomo,2006:23).There can be no doubt then that the political acts that surround leadership succession and regime change constitute a serious aspect of political life in any society. In political systems in general, and in African Politics in particular such act constitutes an important index of development or determination of politics (Anise,1974:507-24).Be that as it may, the essence of democratic elections is that elections be

free and fair. The idea of democratic self-government is incompatible with electoral farces (Ojo, 2008:109-122). Thus, free and fair election is a *condicio sine qua non* for a political system to be termed democratic, but not every election fulfils these criteria.

However, the conduct of elections in evolving democracy in Nigeria is deficient in these cardinal ingredients because of sheer incapacity inherent in such new democracies which barricade adherence to electoral law. (Aluaigba,2008). The quality of elections which is one of the mechanisms for gauging the extent of democratic consolidation, has shown evidence of progressive decline (Alemika&Omotosho,2008). Kean (2004:155) observed that violence is the greatest enemy of democracy, being the bane of Nigeria's march to democracy. To Nwolise(2007:155) there can be no democratic election, democratization, consolidation of democracy, growth in democratic culture or internalization of best democratic practice in any country if electoral violence is prevalent. Albert (2007:132) asserts that electoral violence resulting from representational campaign, balloting, and result conflicts have been a terminal problem of Nigeria politics since the 1950's. Also works by scholars like Akintola(2006);Post &Vickers(1973) and Oshagae (2002) reaffirms Albert's position.

## **CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL APERTURE**

### **Elections**

According to Chafe the primary requirement for debating anything is to understand first and foremost the primary thing being talked about (cited in Ojo,2009:10). It is however necessary to clarify two concepts: election and electoral violence, as one can obtain a useful definition of concept when the boundaries of the concept are reasonably clear. Elections lie at the heart of representative governance giving meaning to the modern conception of democracy (Joseph,1987). Elections are the process of choosing people for particular jobs by voting (Ojo,2007:5). Olaitan (2005:44) sees election as the only acceptable institutionalized process enabling some or all of the recognized members of a democratic society to choose office holders. They not only constitute the mirror of people's understanding and the level of appreciation of a

democratic norm, They are a defining feature of democracy {Ahamba,2002:13}. Other scholars varying from Nwolise(2007);Nnadozie(2004) and Mkandawire(1999) stress the legitimizing role of election.

Akzin(1960:706-708) opines that elections have technical and social significance. In the technical sense, they are the process by which an office is assigned to a person by volition through simultaneous expression of many peoples' opinion. In the social sense, election is the process by which a person gets to office through the participation of the governed. This social aspect of election distinguishes election from appointment which is the cognitive account of voting. The social sense boils down to democracy and distinguishes election from appointment as true election must be with the consent of the governed. This then portends that any election result that is contrary to the votes cast by the people creates a legitimacy crisis. From the foregoing, not just any kind of election can be termed democratic. Credible free and fair elections are a salient indicator of democratic consolidation and the principal institutionalized means of forming and changing democratic government (Aiyede, 2007:33).

### **Electoral Violence**

Corsini (1999) defines violence as the manifestation of hostility and rage through physical force directed against persons or property. Hook (1934:236) defines violence as “the illegal employment of methods of physical coercion for personal or group ends”. Audi (1971) asserts that violence is ‘the unjustifiable use of force’ whether legally or illegally applied. It is evident from the foregoing that violence is the use of physical force against persons or object. However, conflicts that assume violent dimensions could be classified as political violence. Remi Anifowoshe (1982) defines political violence as:

The use or threat of physical act carried out by an individual or individuals within a political system against another individual or individuals, and/or property, with the intent to cause injury or death to persons and/or damage or destruction to property; and whose objective, choice of targets or victims, surrounding circumstances, implementation, and effects have political significance, that is, tend to modify the behavior of others in the existing arrangement of power that has some consequences for the political system.

The above view points to the fact that for violence to be political there must be intent to affect the political process. Political violence that however arises mainly from the conduct of election with the intent of influencing the outcome of election can be described as electoral violence. Electoral violence therefore is a form of anomic participation in the political process (Elaigwu, 2006). However, early works on electoral violence narrow the concept to of electoral violence to physical phenomenon. The term electoral violence therefore means any act of violence perpetrated in the course of political activities, including pre, during and post election periods, and may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral process, or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with the electoral processes (cited in Ladan, 2006:50).

To Ochoche (1997) abuse at any of the stages of election could be structural or physical. Galtung (1991:10-12) submits that violence can be psychological and structural as well as physical. Psychological violence involves generating and living in fear, terrorizing people or publishing abusive material directed against people. Structural violence according to Galtung is usually indirect, but more destructive than physical and psychological violence. Structural violence involves among other factors, political repression, economic exploitation and deprivation of rights such as freedom of choice. However, with the reconceptualization of violence to include psychological and structural dimensions, Albert's definition covers the three dimensions of electoral violence. To him electoral violence is 'all forms of organized acts or threats-physical, psychological and structural aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after an election with a view to determining, delaying or otherwise influencing the electoral process(Albert,2007:133).

### **Unabated Electoral Violence: The Place of Theory**

The importance of theories in political discourse cannot be overemphasized as it proffers empirically based general explanatory laws that are scientific in nature through synthesizing and integrating of empirical data for maximum clarification and unification (Raphael,1978 :2). However, in literature there are a lot of theories that could be explored to explain unabated electoral violence in Nigeria. The pluralist theory could be applied in the Nigeria situation. The

pluralist theory posits that conflict is inevitable in a plural society (Cohen, 1996). In fact, competition between plural groups takes place largely in political arena. However, the dimension of conflict generated by competition becomes more complex in democracies of the third world and particularly Nigeria where ethnicity has permeated every facet of national life. The ongoing insurgent activities perpetrated by the Boko Haram sect in North Eastern Nigeria varying from bombing, maiming, and killing of innocent citizens in the polity cannot be dissociated from the power tussle between the North and the South. It is believed in some quarters that it is the turn of a Northerner to preside over the affairs of Nigeria instead of the incumbent President of Nigeria from the South-South geo-political zone. Cultural pluralism therefore engenders minority/majority dichotomy, and perceived asymmetric access to power. Without any iota of doubt, ethnicity plays a major role in mobilizing electoral support for candidates in variegated societies like Nigeria. With such conditions free and fair elections in the run-up during and after election becomes pretty difficult.

Furthermore, the culture of violence in relation to the electoral process could also be explained using the psychological theories, especially Ted Gurr's theory of relative deprivation (1980) coupled with James Davies(1971) J-curve hypothesis. The centrality of the theory rest on the fact that frustration-aggression mechanism is analogous to the law of gravity: men who are frustrated have an innate disposition to do violence to its source in proportion to the intensity of their frustration, just as objects are attracted to one another in direct proportion to their relative masses (Dugan, 2004). In view of the theorist, the primary source of human capacity for violence appears to be frustration-aggression mechanism. This then portends that unfulfilled expectations create relative deprivation gap between expectations and capabilities. In other word, when someone or group of people have the perception of their ability or right to get something (goal),if prevented from attaining such goals, the result is frustration which will in turn generate aggressive behaviors that will snowball to violence. This is always the case in Nigeria, when an individual or group of people are hindered in achieving their perceived goals in relation to getting to public office frustration sets in, leading to aggressive behavior that may sprout chaotic electoral process.

## **ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The challenges of electoral competition in Nigeria cannot be fully grasped without situating them in the context of the country's historical experiences (Alabi, 2009:283). As documented by Arthur Gibson (2007) to truly understand where we are going as a country one must understand where we came from. Electoral principle was introduced in 1922 with the advent of the Clifford constitution which gave room for voting in Lagos and Calabar and thus, paving way for politicking in the Nigerian polity. However, from the 1959 general elections that ushered in independence in 1960, Nigeria began to experience exacerbated electoral violence varying from physical, structural and psychological violence (Nwolise, 2007:162). Since there hardly existed any ideological difference among the different political parties, most politicians rallied around their ethnic affiliations for electoral votes and support (Ugoh, 2004:170). It is worth noting that electoral violence was minimal during the 1959 elections because of the overwhelming presence of the colonial masters.

The 1964 general elections were the first election conducted by Nigerian elite after independence. Prior to the elections, the contested results of the national census and the intense political campaign by political parties had heightened the political stake and thus affected the outcome of the elections which was marred by unethical practices. There was prevalence of violence such as maiming, kidnapping, arson and murder. Election violence reaches their crescendo in 1965-1966 during the Western Regional elections. Electoral violence in the Western Region emanated from the tense electoral battle between the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) and the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) for the control of the government of the Western Region. The attendant rigging, structural and physical violence that characterize the conduct of the electoral process made the Eastern part of the country to boycott the elections. It was reported that about a thousand lives were lost (Malu, 2006:135). To Ochoche (1997) the Western Regional crisis of 1965-1966 remains the worst single period of electoral violence in the history of Nigeria.

The succession crisis culminated to the collapse of the first republic as the military made incursion to politics thereby giving room to military dictatorship (Nwolise, 2007; Ojo & Azeez, 2002). Also, power tussle among top military hierarchy on who is eligible to takeover power

plunge the polity into a 30 months agonizing civil war (Ojo,2007:19).The military however held sway of power for 13years(1966-1979) from the time democratic experiment was truncated in the first republic. The military cabal of General Olusegun Obasanjo initiated a transition to civil rule after the demise of Murtala Muhammed as civil populace became weary of military government. The general elections conducted under Obasanjo's era that ushered in the Second Republic were not devoid of malpractice. Various forms of electoral malpractices were also recorded. The malpractice ranged from victimization, use of thugs, manipulations of results by the polling agents to bribing of electoral officials as well as Policemen (Ugoh, 2004:172).

In the word of Nwolise (2007) the election was characterized by violence at the three stages pre-election, during the election and post election. There was hardly any state where the results were not contested or disputed. Prominent outstanding challenge was that of Chief Obafemi Awolowo against the declaration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) as the winner of the Presidential elections. However, due to the overbearing presence of the military serious violence did not broke out (Malu, 2006; Ojo&Azeez, 2006).The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) government led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari, conducted the 1983 elections. The general elections were not different. The elections organized by civilian incumbent government were badly organized and turbulent as NPN wanted to remain in power at all cost. Thus, the anomalies led to an upsurge of violence before, during and after elections .As documented by Fola &Ihonwhere(1985:221). The Nigerian Labour Congress averred:

We know what democracy means,it goes just beyond voting and campaigns. The 1983 elections were badly done, only a fool will say we had an election. While all parties rigged the elections, the ruling NPN employed gestapo and mafia tactics to win its landslide.

Unabated riots, uncertainties and violence resulted into military takeover of government on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1983. The military incursion altered Nigeria's march as Nigerians were unable to exercise their civic duty of voting for close to ten years (Malu, 2006).

The 1993 general elections were conducted by General Ibrahim Babangida, the then military head of state. Babangida allow for the formation and registration of two political parties to

contest general elections. The elections conducted during this era were adjudged the most free and fair election the country ever had. The Presidential election was annulled. He handed over to an interim government led by Chief Ernest Shonekan. After three month, General Sani Abacha succeeded Ernest Shonekan, he overthrew him in a palace coup arrangement. General Sani Abacha wanted to perpetrate himself in power with the purported transition programme before his demise on June 8, 1998. General Abdul Salam then succeeded Sani Abacha. He effected a transition from military to civil rule in less than a year. The 1999 general elections that usherd in Obasanjo only witnessed flickers of violence as Nigerians were tired of military rule (Nwolise 2007;Malu,2006; Ojo&Azeez 2002).

The 2003 elections conducted by the PDP led government of Olusegun Obasanjo reignited electoral violence as witnessed in 1964 and 1983 by incumbent civilian government. Elections were blatantly rigged through illicit means varying from ballot stuffing and snatching of ballot boxes with aid from security agents. Before, during and after elections were characterized by various form of electoral violence. Factionalisation within political party, collapse of pact between godfathers and godsons and political homicides heated up the polity (Elaigwu, 2006:18; Nwolise, 2007). The 2007 elections conducted for intending public office holders was also conducted by Obasanjo. The 2007 Nigeria general elections also recorded an upsurge of irregularity and maneuvering of the electoral process. In the words of Cashmir Igbokwe, a columnist for Sunday punch he opined that 2007 elections was war by another name with the scores of violence and attendant irregularities that characterize the conduct of the April general elections(The Punch,22 April 2007:170). The attendant electoral fraud that permeate the conduct of 2007 elections was vividly captured in so many write-ups varying from (Adetula, 2007:227-260; Ojo, 2011; TMG, 2007; Ugoh, 2007). As documented by Human Right Watch (2007) scores of violence remained unabated as at least 300 people including policemen were killed in election-related violence.

The conduct of 2011 elections was better than that of 2007 as the Independent National Electoral Commission under the leadership of Professor Jega was transparent in the administration of the 2011 elections. However, the announcement of election result led to post election violence that

culminated to loss of lives and properties in some states in Northern Nigeria. Human Right Watch reported that the announcement of Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan as the winner of presidential elections led to deadly election-related and communal violence in Northern Nigeria. As recorded the April 2011 Presidential voting left more than 800 people dead. The victims were killed in three days of rioting in 12 Northern States(Human Right Watch, 2011).

### **UNABATED ELECTORAL VIOLENCE: AN APPRAISSAL OF PRECIPITATING FACTORS IN NIGERIA**

Orderly transfer of power from one government to another in accordance with democratic norms has been problematic in the Nigerian polity. Indeed electoral violence has become a clog in the wheel of democratic progress as violence always manifest at all the three stages of election process; pre-election, during the election and post-election period. However, myriads of factor are responsible for turbulent transfer of political power from one regime to another. The attractive nature of public office (Ugoh, 2004:178) coupled with the weak regulatory framework in the use of money in politics and investment mentality that governs party and election in Nigeria is one of the root causes of turbulent elections.

Claude Ake(1964:24) posits:

Those who win state power can have all the wealth they want even without working, while those who lose the struggle for state power cannot have security in the wealth they have made even by hard work. The capture of state power inevitably becomes a matter of life and death. That is one reason why our politics is so intense, anarchic and violent.

The ostentatious lifestyle of Political office holders is a great stimulus for those outside to go any length to win election (Usman,2009). As documented in The Punch Newspaper by NnaEmeka Meribe and Gbenga Adeniji, the writers did a comparative analysis of Nigerian Legislators earning and those of other countries. The comparative analysis revealed that Nigerian Legislators can pay many of their counterparts in other countries and still remain very rich .As reported in

The Punch Newspaper in Nigeria; Indian Lawmakers need to work for at least 49 years to earn the annual salary of a Nigerian Senator. Thus, winning election then becomes a 'do or die' affair, any attempt to foil getting to public office encourages corrupt practices and triggers violence as the winner takes all. Ojo(2009:4) documented this, to him A former Senate President, Adolphus Wabara opined:

Membership of the National Assembly is an investment because most of us sold our house to get to the Senate, but the ability to recoup whatever you spent legitimately that is the problem.

From the foregoing, the attractiveness of public office engenders investment mentality. Political investors and other major financiers of the political process for individuals seeking political office expend huge sum of money on the electoral process with expected return. Therefore, no amount is too much to use in instigating electoral violence, even expending the lives of opponents and valueless youths

Ineffective law enforcement is another core contributory factor that encourages turbulent elections. Non enforcement of laws and non-adherence to same in the electoral process promotes violence during elections; due to lack of political will by the political class (Aluigba, 2008). Political actors, players, party supporters and political thugs violate the law that governs the rule of politicking with impunity due to inability of the government and other law enforcement bodies to compel obedience. It worthy to note that when the administrators of the political process is unwilling to enforce the rules, a lot of opportunities are created for violence and if the law does not prevail, it is tantamount to the absence of rules governing the conduct of elections (Smah, 2008:65-83). Therefore, the weak legal framework in Nigeria forms the fulcrum upon which the culture of violence is built and sustained resulting in violence, arson and assassination. As Aiyede observed, when the rule of law is weak, the judicial system becomes ineffective and there are ineffective penalties that make the probability of punishment of offenders low, thus creating a fragile and corrupt system (Aiyede, 2007:33-54).

Poverty pervasiveness is another factor that hastens the occurrence of electoral violence in Nigeria (Usman, 2009). To Abiola and Olaopa (2008;32) the scourge of poverty in Nigeria is an incontrovertible fact which results in hunger, ignorance, malnutrition, diseases, unemployment as well as general level of human hopelessness. The massive poverty that engulfs the body polity is a great asset to the politicians. The alarming rate of unemployment gives youth away as willing tools for the perpetration of violence with little financial inducement. In the words of Danjibo and Oladeji (2007:180-200) the high spate of deprivation and human hopelessness of the Nigerian youths force them to take the readily available “job opportunity” –implementers of electoral violence. The endemic poverty easily plays the gullible youths into the hands of unscrupulous politicians, who manipulate them by dangling irresistible baits for the youths to undertake electoral violence(Usman,2009).More often than not political violence is paid for, used as a tool by prominent Nigerians to bolster their political and financial positions.

Rigging is also a predisposing factor that easily makes the entire process violent (Balogun,2003;Usman,2009).Experiences of the past conduct of elections reveals that subverting the electoral process through massive organized fraud do engender violent upheaval, before, during and after elections. The use of political thugs by politician to maneuver electoral process in perceived unflavored area does cause violence if resisted by the opposition or the citizenry. Also, when an unpopular candidate is declared the winner of election, violence always greeted such announcement. The Western Regional election of 1965-1966 that was characterized by wanton destruction of lives and properties is a reference. Also, violence greeted the announcement of 2007 gubernatorial elections in some states of the federation as a result of perceived rigging resulting into arson and loss of lives and properties. Curfew was imposed in part of Edo, Osun, Ondo, Kogi and Kano states to calm the violence.(The Punch,17 April 2007:8). Elections were later overturned in Edo and Osun states.

It is also worthy to note, that lack of trust in the electoral tribunal is also a factor. Candidates and their supporters do resort to violence instead of embarking on an endless venture as the impartiality of the Judges at the tribunal are in doubt. Where elections are not struck out on technical ground, they are protracted for a long period and justice is not guaranteed. (The

Nation,22 February 2010:15).The media indulgence in campaign of calumny, mudslinging and defamation or slanderous attack on other political actors cannot but be mentioned as a causative instrument for electoral violence. The media spread of sensational political and motivated opinions engender violence by succumbing to the influence of selfish politicians to use their outfit as propaganda launch pad (IRI, 2007; Usman, 2009).

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This paper encapsulated how violence has continued to impede Nigeria's democratization process from independence. Conceptual and theoretical issues, electoral violence in historical perspective and the polemic, which is an appraisal of the predisposing factors to electoral violence in Nigeria. It is evident from the write-up that orgies of violence have been a recurring trend in Nigeria's election history. Thus, electoral violence poses a great threat to Nigeria's nascent democracy.

To purge the body polity of the infestation of incessant electoral violence it is important to recommend the following policy options as remedy to the menace of electoral violence. There is need for the political class in Nigeria to adhere to the provisions of the law through enforcement of the electoral law as stipulated in the electoral act to serve as deterrent to others as experience has shown that politicians and security operatives shield perpetrators of violence over the years. Politicians, godfathers and political thugs who err from the rule of politicking by heating up the polity with violence during electioneering period should be subject to face the wrath of the law as no one ought to be above the law.

Not only that, the Judiciary and the independent National Electoral Commission should be truly independent of the influence of the political executive in order to operate efficiently without bias or prejudice. The mass media need to adhere to international standard of journalistic integrity by not been bias and avoiding partisan reporting during electioneering period. Improving on the economy is also essential; a country where poverty is pervasive and unemployment rate is high, poor and idle hands can easily be hired by politicians as political thugs to achieve their end. The paradigm for democratic peace is one that focuses attention on economic productivity (Smah,

2008: 65-83). Strengthening and training of security agencies is also imperative. Finally, the National Orientation Agency, the Mass Media, stakeholders and other relevant agencies should embark on massive and sustained civic education of the citizenry on the negative consequences of electoral violence and the need to imbibe democratic ethos and principles.

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